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TO THE PEOPLE

OF THE

TWENTY-FIRST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA.

A treaty has been signed for the annexation of Texas to the territories of the United States. I now feel called upon to state to you, my fellow-citizens, and late constituents, the grounds of my acquiescence in this momentous measure.

I have thought much upon this subject, and endeavored to give it a candid and impartial consideration, which has produced the most decided conviction in my mind, that it is of the highest importance to the welfare and happiness of the whole country, and especially conducive to the great interests of you, who so lately honored me with your confidence and support.

To the United States, as a nation, it gives a compact territory, which is so essential for defence in war, and so useful in peace, by removing all cause of collision, arising from infraction of revenue laws, and from disputes about common rights in navigating rivers.

Eight years ago, Texas gained her independence on the fields of San Jacinto, and has, ever since, maintained it. She has been recognised by the first powers of Europe; has preserved the character of an independent and sovereign State, through all that time, and is now as thoroughly severed from Mexico as the latter republic is from the kingdom of Spain, to which she belonged not more than twenty-two years ago. I cannot perceive how the right of Texas to negotiate with foreign powers, to form alliances, or to transfer her territory to another government, can be questioned. In 1819, we ceded Texas to Spain. In 1822, we recognized the independence of Mexico. In March, 1825, one of the first acts of the new administration, Mr. Adams President, Mr. Clay Secretary of State, both uniting in the measure, was the offer to purchase Texas from Mexico—in the face of the solemn protest of Spain, and while war was still pending between that kingdom and its revolted province. The important Fortress of San Juan d'Ulloa, which commanded the principal port and almost the entire trade of Mexico, was, during all this time, in the possession of Spain, and was not finally evacuated until December 23d, 1825. The naval warfare

did not cease for many years afterwards; Spain actually not recognising the independence of Mexico, until after Texas had established hers. If there be any force in the objection that Texas is still unrecognised by Mexico, it would have been much stronger to the proposed negotiation of Messrs. Adams and Clay, in 1825; for Mexico was then not only unrecognised by Spain, but, also, by other of the principal powers of Europe. This proposition was made less than six years after we had, by solemn treaty, ceded Texas to Spain. Nor, at this moment, is any war pending between Texas and Mexico, other than by paper bulletins; and even this has been suspended by a late armistice. What wrong, then, is done to Mexico? What will she lose? Not Texas!—for that is already lost. There will be no loss; Mexico will gain a peaceful and friendly neighbor, having both the will and determination to guaranty the integrity of all her actual territories against any European power. The law of nations authorizes this treaty with Texas, for her independence is recognised and established. Our treaty with Mexico is rescinded by the revolution in Texas, just as our prior treaty with Spain was abrogated by the successful revolt of Mexico herself. It is not, and never has been, a principle of the law of nations, that a revolted province is not fully and absolutely sovereign, until she is recognised by the power from which she has been severed by the revolution. This power must, necessarily, be the very last among nations to recognise such independence.

This people were first invited to settle the wild lands of Texas by the King of Spain, and afterwards encouraged in extending their settlement by the very government of Mexico; all under the pledge of the protection of those rights held so dear and sacred by every American. A disregard of those pledges, and an attempt at subjugation, were met on the part of the people of Texas by resistance and successful revolt, which now constitute them a sovereign and independent people.

The vast territory of nearly three hundred thousand square miles which belongs to Texas, without any conflict with the actual possessions of the republic of Mexico; starting from the Gulf, is bounded on the south by the noble Rio Bravo del Norte, to the point where that beautiful stream breaks forth from its mountain passes, and from thence north, is separated to the westward from the well-known Sante Fé province, by a strongly defined natural boundary of mountainous and prairie country, which, if not uninhabitable, will for a long time be left free to the Indian, buffalo, and roving trapper.

The most indisputable proof exists that Spain, in 1819, when she sold Florida to the Union, and the latter ceded Texas to Spain, had actually instructed her minister to acknowledge, if necessary, our title to the whole, or greater part, of Texas, as part of the Louisiania territory purchased by us in 1803.

The question of annexation, has been discussed in the various newspapers published over the country. Every one who trusts in the perpetuity of our

Union, of which no true American ever doubts, knows that the bonds of connection have strengthened with the increase of territory, and that the confederative system beautifully adapts itself to any extent of country. Local legislation by Congress, or its interference with the strict province of the States, becomes impossible, when national objects and interests engross its attention. In a confederacy of great extent, threats of disunion, when confined to so small a sphere as the limits of a single State, carry with them no cause for alarm, and can never instil into the most traitorous bosom any hope of success.

The elevated and mountainous districts of Texas extend on the southwest to within one hundred miles of the Gulf coast. Its high table-lands, with its hills and valleys, will be best adapted to the growing of grain or raising stock; which class of labor is appropriate to the small proprietor and freeman. The division between the planting and farming districts, is marked by the best natural boundaries; and no edict of man can change it. There is neither necessity nor excuse for extending slave labor beyond the alluvial districts bordering on the Gulf and the lower Red river, nor can it ever be so extended by law. The rich lands of this region, running three degrees farther south than the best sugar lands of Louisiana, must always be settled, if annexed, by a population whose interests will be American.

This section of Texas, which must, chiefly, be a sugar-growing region, and therefore identified with that portion of Louisiana now engaged in the same culture, will unite in supporting the great principle of extending full and adequate protection to American products and industry. Sugar is a crop which must always look to the home-market for the surest sale and most certain return. We shall thus gain in the southwest a powerful accession of strength upon that great question which so deeply involves the interests of your district. I candidly believe that it will not be long before a majority of the people of the South, when their labor is thus diverted into many different channels, will become convinced of the sound policy of protecting and fostering American industry. This will not only be important and decisive in favor of such policy, but will be eminently calculated to harmonize and perpetuate our institutions—a result to be hailed with gladness by every patriotic heart.

I am no advocate for slavery; nor would I see it introduced into one region, unless I were at the same time assured that it would withdraw it from another, and that without increasing it in the aggregate. The annexation of Texas must soon be followed by the voluntary abolition of the institution of slavery in our neighboring States—Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware; and also, indeed, in Kentucky and Missouri. We can all truly rejoice in its withdrawal from our our own immediate vicinity. I am satisfied that the best interests of that class of our fellow-beings, originally brought to, and forced on, these States by British rapacity and injustice, and who must always be a marked and distinct race, as

long as they abide among our own people, will be best consulted by securing the only outlet, the only hope which has ever presented itself for their acquiring an independent home, or attaining a position elevated and equal to the people amidst whom they dwell. Such a refuge is offered beyond the Rio Bravo, among the Mexican and South American nations, who have no prejudice either to caste or color.

The treaty is now with the Senate, to be confirmed or rejected. You, as a part of the great American family, are called upon to consider how it affects your own immediate interests, as well as those of the nation to which you belong.

The inhabitants of Allegheny county are a mining, manufacturing, commercial, agricultural and navigating people. Every interest of these several branches of industry, will be vastly promoted by securing to us, under our present tariff, thus extended by annexation, over all its territory, the entire markets of Texas. The navigation of the Red river, (one of the chief tributaries of the Mississippi,) furnishing one thousand miles of navigation into the heart of a rich country, now a divided and common right, will then be exclusively our own. To that, add the important rivers—the Trinity, Brazos, Colorado, Rio Bravo del Norte, and many other smaller but navigable streams, and we behold the vast demand from that region on the boat-builders and mechanics of the Ohio valley, adding at least one hundred steamboats, large and small, yearly, to the many now built for the wants of Western navigation. Our boats, which will benefit by the great carrying-trade between Texas and her sister States, will, in return for our manufactures of iron, cotton, wool, hemp, and glass, and the products of the farms and forest carried there, receive and bring back her cotton and sugar, her rice and indigo, and probably even her coffee and other tropical products.

The Santa Fé trade, which has already become so lucrative to many among you, would be cut off from us by a foreign, and by no means necessarily friendly, power, whose territories intervene between us and that region, if the treaty should fail to be ratified. The Manchester wagon, and Hartley's strong harness, will no longer serve to carry American domestics and Pittsburg wares across the prairies, to be converted at Santa Fé into bullion and Mexican dollars. On the other hand, with our territories bordering on New Mexico, this trade would soon be vastly increased; for a Pittsburg steamboat, with cargo on board, can ascend the Red river to a point less than three hundred miles remote from Santa Fé, and at a distance of five hundred miles from Chihuahua, the first great interior city of the integral provinces of Mexico, which is but slightly further than that city is from Santa Fé, the present mart at which our traders meet those from the region of Chihuahua.

To the entire people of the United States, this question is of vast and weighty

moment. If the treaty for the annexation should now be rejected, the reaction of feeling in Texas must be intense and overwhelming. She must then, inevitably, become a commercial dependency, in fact, if not in name, of Great Britain. You may rest assured that *even* should a free-trade treaty not be concluded between England and Texas, the latter will so modify and relax her tariff by discriminating duties—augmenting the imposts upon flour, grain, beef, pork, lard, and such articles, whilst taking off those on iron and all its manufactures, glass, cotton bagging, and all cotton and woollen fabrics, and similar articles; thereby excluding American products, and admitting England's free of duty. Such is the avowed policy of Texas, as a separate republic; and thus, even without a treaty with England, that country will monopolize her markets. But it will not end here. Texas, like Gibraltar and Portugal to Spain, will be made the great entrepôt and channel of British commerce, by means of which her active merchants will, in defiance of all imposts and tariffs, not only flood the interior of Mexico with British wares, but, through the channels of the Trinity, Sabine, and Red rivers, glut our own country with a multiplicity of every kind of her extensive manufactures, breaking up our very best establishments, and carrying ruin and bankruptcy into every manufacturing district of the United States.

The imports, which we must receive from abroad, instead of being brought, as they now are, chiefly in American vessels into our ports, will, to escape the duties, be carried to Texas, to be smuggled into the United States. This will impair, if not destroy, our great navigating interests on the high seas, which it has always been the policy of our Government to foster. This was clearly foreseen by Mr. Van Buren, who, in his despatch to Mr. Poinsett, the American minister at Mexico, on the 25th August, 1829, the very first year of General Jackson's administration, directly alludes to this question of smuggling, when instructing that minister to endeavor to procure the annexation of Texas to this Union by a purchase and cession from Mexico.

But the evil does not cease with the injury to the shipping interest. Our revenues from imposts on foreign commerce necessarily falling short of the wants of the Government, we shall be forced to resort to direct taxation to support and maintain the Government.

In 1839, our exports to Texas, which was then recognised by no other power, amounted to one and three-quarter million of dollars; but now, instead of having doubled with her population, they have dwindled down to two hundred thousand dollars in value, being not one-seventh of what they were in 1839. In that year those exports to Texas embraced over one-fourth of the total exports of *our* manufactures to all the rest of the world. As a tariff man, I have always viewed the home as the best market for our manufactures; and where such markets can be extended with honor and propriety, it would be madness in the advocate

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for the protection of domestic industry to oppose such an extension. These markets are beyond the influence of foreign diplomacy, or the rivalry and jealousy of other nations, and must forever remain exclusively our own.

Should Texas be refused admission into the Union, she must become a most dangerous theatre for foreign intrigue, from which the most deplorable consequences to our welfare may ensue. Indeed, at some future and not distant day, we may be compelled, for the safety and perpetuity of the Union, to gain by conquest what is now so freely offered for our acceptance.

But with the coast of Texas added to ours, we should then have nearly the entire shore of our own great sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and would then not only be beyond the reach of smugglers, but would also set at defiance any attempt at invasion directed against New Orleans or the great outlet of the commerce of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers.

Now, my fellow-citizens, having given you my views on this subject, let me recall your attention, without reference to Florida, to the acquisition of Louisiana, without which we should not at this moment be the united and happy people which constitute this great nation. Yet that noble purchase was not without opposition of a decided, and, indeed, most violent character; however, no patriot of that day lives to regret that addition to our territories.

I am, fellow-citizens, your grateful and obliged friend,

WM. WILKINS.

Washington, *April* 13, 1844.

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